

year games while our adversaries and competitors plan years and decades in advance.

As former Defense Secretary Bob Gates put it in an interview this week, cutting spending on our military would be “a terrible mistake.” That is President Obama’s Defense Secretary, Bob Gates.

There could not be a more dangerous approach for the United States—short-changing the Pentagon and making America less competitive.

The first draft of the so-called jobs bill that the White House put forward would play into the same dangerous dynamic. I am talking about the multi-trillion-dollar proposal that spends less than 6 percent—less than 6 percent—on roads and bridges, the plan that Ivy League economists say would cost hundreds of billions of dollars more than the White House says; push American workers’ wages down; and somehow manage to shrink our economy despite taxing, borrowing, and spending trillions more dollars. That is not a plan to make America stronger and more competitive; it is a plan to pile up debt to leave us even weaker. It would be better news for Beijing than for our own citizens.

That is the bad news. The good news is that the Senate can do better. This body has long tackled real infrastructure on a commonsense, bipartisan basis and ended up with bills that passed by big, lopsided, bipartisan votes. That is what we Republicans are prepared to do again. That is the path I discussed with President Biden at the White House just yesterday. It was a good meeting. That is the road that the practical proposal from Senator CAPITO and a number of my fellow Republican Senators would begin to take us down.

If our Democratic friends are finally ready to reach across the aisle and work together to locate common ground, I am hopeful we can do a lot of good for the country and compete with China for real.

IRAN

Mr. McCONNELL. On one final matter, the attacks being directed at innocent Israeli citizens are coming from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic jihad. Both these terrorist groups receive support from Iran.

The regime in Tehran is the most active state sponsor of terrorism in the entire world. The regime supports Shia terrorists, Sunni terrorists, and secular terrorists.

Many of the rockets now raining down on Israel cities are gifts from Iran, technologies of terror honed by Iran’s proxies in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

Days ago, the U.S. Navy seized weapons on a vessel that appears to have been dispatched from Iran bound for Yemen to fuel the violent Houthi terrorists, in violation of the U.N. embargo. Just last night, the Houthis again fired missiles against Saudi Arabia.

Public reporting suggests Iran’s proxies, on top of assassinating Iraqi protesters, are stepping up attacks on the U.S. and coalition presence in Iraq as well. Iran is emboldened by our retreat from Afghanistan. They are eager to challenge an administration that appears desperate to return to a failed deal.

What former Defense Secretary Bob Gates said this week about weakness inviting challenge from China and Russia applies to Iran as well.

The answer is not accommodation; it is America’s strength. But reportedly, this administration is considering preemptive concessions—a huge rollback of sanctions, squandering our leverage, just to leap back into a failed nuclear deal. I sincerely hope these reports prove to be wrong.

It is difficult to believe an American President would consider removing terrorism- or missile-related sanctions at the very moment Iranian rockets are raining down on Israel, Iranian-backed militia are attacking American facilities in Iraq, and Iranian missiles are being trained on Saudi Arabia.

I cannot understand why the administration is considering any sanctions relief to induce Tehran back into the Obama deal in the first place. It would be total malpractice to squander our leverage just to jump back into a flawed deal. That kind of preemptive capitulation would make negotiating a better deal much, much more difficult.

Iran’s own Foreign Minister has lamented that the terror masterminds of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps basically run the country. So what on Earth does our administration think the successors of Soleimani would do with another influx of cash?

If the administration will stay smart, stay tough, and work toward a better deal that truly halts Iran’s nuclear and missile programs, as well as a strategy to confront Iranian terrorism, then the President will find support and partnership from the Republican side. But if the administration chooses policies that leave America weaker and the world more dangerous, Republicans will stand up for the right course.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Amber Faye McReynolds, of Colorado, to be a Governor of the United States Postal Service for a term expiring December 8, 2026.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Hampshire.

AFGHANISTAN

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to address what I believe is an urgent and fundamental issue of our policy in Afghanistan, and that is, what happens to the women and girls when the United States and NATO forces leave after 20 years?

Over the years, as I have talked to my constituents and people around the country, one of the things they have all been united on about our effort in Afghanistan has been the difference that our intervention has made for women and girls.

Before we went into Afghanistan in 2002, girls were not allowed to go to school, women were not allowed to work, and there was no freedom of movement for women and girls unless they had a male escort. They couldn’t listen to music. They were required to wear burqas anytime they went out of their homes.

What we have seen has been safety and security for Afghan women and girls as the result of our intervention, but now all of these gains are at risk as we withdraw our forces. The lack of emphasis on the safety and security of Afghan women and girls in the peace process is what has brought us to this point.

We are leaving by September, and there is no plan to ensure that the rights that were achieved for women and girls are actually protected, even though we have legislation that says that in conflict areas like Afghanistan, we have a responsibility to ensure that women are at the negotiating table.

Well, as we rethink the role of the United States in Afghanistan, I want to put a face on what we are talking about, what it means if we don’t prioritize women’s rights there.

In March of this year, the State Department posthumously honored seven women who were given the International Women of Courage Award. These are all women who were killed in Afghanistan in 2020. They are pictured here. They were murdered—assassinated, really—for choosing to live their lives outside of the narrow confines of what the Taliban and other extremist groups deem acceptable for women, and they reflect the thousands of other women in Afghanistan who have been the targets of violence.

We have seen over the last months of 2020 and beginning of 2021 that women were deliberately targeted for assassination, particularly women in high-profile positions. These women have been murdered for going to school, for reporting the news, for delivering healthcare or running for public office. We talk about them as courageous, and certainly they are, but they should not have to be courageous to do the kinds of things that they were murdered for.

It should not require courage to be a journalist like Malalai Maiwand, who